CHURCH FARMHOUSE 63 CHURCH END BIDDENHAM BEDFORDSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION, INVESTIGATION, RECORDING, ANALYSIS AND PUBLICATION

Albion archaeology





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Preface

Every effort has been made in the preparation and submission of this document and all statements are offered in good faith. Albion Archaeology cannot accept responsibility for errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by a third party, or for any loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in this document.

The project was commissioned by Mr S. Taheri and was monitored on behalf of the Local Planning Authority by Geoff Saunders (Bedford Borough Council Archaeological Officer).

The fieldwork was undertaken by James Newboult (Project Officer) and Slawomir Utrata (Site Supervisor). This report was prepared by Ben Barker. The illustrations are by Joan Lightning (CAD Technician). All Albion projects are under the overall management of Drew Shotliff (Operations Manager).

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Key Terms

Throughout this document the following terms or abbreviations are used:

AO BBC Archaeological Officer BBC Bedford Borough Council

ClfA Chartered Institute for Archaeologists

Client Mr Sam Taheri DA Development area

HER Historic Environment Record

HET Historic Environment Team of BBC WSI Written Scheme of Investigation



Non-technical Summary

Planning consent (10/00276/FUL) for alterations and extensions to Church Farmhouse, 63 Church End, Biddenham, was granted by Bedford Borough Council (BBC). As the development area lies within the historic core of the village of Biddenham, within a wider area of high archaeological potential (prehistoric to medieval), a condition was attached to the planning consent requiring the implementation of an archaeological mitigation strategy. Albion Archaeology prepared a Written Scheme of Investigation, setting out a strategy for a programme of archaeological works, which was approved by the BBC's Historic Environment Team.

The observation and recording of groundworks associated with the construction of a pool-house were completed on 17/05/2011. This demonstrated that the area of the new swimming pool and associated buildings had been highly disturbed by modern landscaping activity. The BBC Archaeological Officer agreed that no further archaeological work was required in this area.

The foundations for the kitchen extension were excavated under archaeological supervision on 30/10/2015. These were traditional strip foundation trenches, 0.7m wide by c. 1.2m deep, within an area measuring c. 9m by 4m. Interior ground reduction did not extend below the level of made ground associated with a previous conservatory structure.

Three ditches and a shallow pit were identified within the foundation trenches. It is probable that the features pre-date the current 18th- to 19th-century farm buildings, but are unlikely to be associated with any substantially earlier phase of domestic activity. It is possible that the ditch may have defined an agricultural plot boundary that influenced the layout of the complex of buildings that form Church Farm.

The small size of the investigation area and the absence of securely dated material preclude any further analysis. The project archive will be deposited with The Higgins Museum, Bedford (accession no. BEDFM 2010.30). This report will be uploaded onto the Archaeology Data Service's OASIS website (OASIS ID no. albionar1-100396).



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Planning consent (10/00276/FUL) for alterations and extensions to Church Farmhouse, 63 Church End, Biddenham, was granted by Bedford Borough Council (BBC). The consented changes included the construction of a swimming pool and pool-house within the garden of the property, and the extension of the kitchen to the rear of the existing farmhouse building.

Due to the high archaeological potential of the site, a condition was attached to the planning consent requiring the implementation of an archaeological mitigation strategy. This was done on the advice of the Historic Environment Team (HET), in accordance with the national policy provided in the *National Planning Policy Framework* (DCLG 2012).

Albion Archaeology was commissioned to prepare the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (Albion 2010) in accordance with the requirements of the planning condition, and to carry out the subsequent programme of archaeological works. This report details the results of that programme of works.

1.2 Site and Development Description

Church Farm is situated on the western edge of Biddenham, approximately 3km to the west of Bedford (Figure 1). Church Farmhouse forms the southwestern corner of a courtyard comprising former agricultural buildings, now converted to residential use.

The development area (DA) was located within the gardens of Church Farmhouse. It was centred on (NGR) TL 0133 4988 and covered an area of c. 1.06ha. The land within the DA lies at a height of c. 36m OD.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The DA sits within an area that has high potential for the survival of archaeological remains of prehistoric to medieval date. Major archaeological investigations have been undertaken in advance of housing developments and the construction of the Bedford Western Bypass within the Biddenham Loop. These have demonstrated that the area to the south of the DA contains significant sub-surface archaeological remains from the early Neolithic through to the early Saxon period. These are detailed in the WSI (Albion 2010) and summarised below.

1.3.1 Prehistoric (before AD 43)

The Biddenham area has 'the distinction of being the first prolific Palaeolithic sites to have been discovered in England' (Wymer 1999, 123). Hundreds of handaxes, some associated with mammoth remains, were found in 19th-century quarry pits adjacent to Bromham Road to the north of the DA (Luke 2007, 24). Two handaxes were found in the ploughsoil during evaluation on the Biddenham Loop to the south of the DA. They were found adjacent to a



former quarry, suggesting that they may have been derived from deep in the gravel (Luke 2008, 19).

Field artefact collection as part of evaluation of the Biddenham Loop has located a large number of flint concentrations suggestive of occupation sites. Those of late Mesolithic/early Neolithic date were located adjacent to the River Great Ouse but just above its flood plain. A single broken Neolithic polished stone axe (HER 7447) was found *c*. 250m north-west of St James Church.

The Biddenham Loop is known to contain a Neolithic and early Bronze Age monument complex. The landscape changed in the middle Bronze Age to comprise an extensive system of fields; these were concentrated to the south and east of the Loop away from the DA. In total, eight middle Iron Age farmsteads were identified within the Bovis Homes (Luke 2008) and David Wilson Homes (Albion 2008) investigations. They were all limited in extent and situated above, but within *c*. 100m of, the floodplain. Their spacing (between 250m-650m apart) raises the possibility that similar remains may be present within the vicinity of the DA.

1.3.2 Romano-British (AD c. 43–450)

The Ouse Valley appears to have been densely settled in the late Iron Age/Romano-British period. Four Romano-British farmsteads are known within the Biddenham Loop to the south of the DA. All comprised a system of ditched enclosures linked to trackways extending over 1.5ha in extent. A fifth has been proposed *c*. 100m north of the DA (Luke 2008, 267–8). This was first firmly identified when a branch of the Southern Orbital Sewer was constructed to Biddenham village; Roman ditches, possible stone structures and artefacts were visible after earthmoving (ibid). Its extent is uncertain but Roman pottery, coins and other metalwork have been found to the north of St James' Church (HER 323). In addition, the HER also notes the presence of numerous fragments of limestone within this field, of the type used for the construction of buildings. Evaluation trenching undertaken in advance of a proposed extension to St James' churchyard confirmed the presence of Roman settlement in this area (Albion 2005), although it is uncertain if it extended as far south as the DA.

Eighteen coins dating to this period (HER 15155) were found *c*. 200m south of the DA, although the HER notes that the exact findspot could not be reliably located. Another findspot of two Roman coins (HER 15953) is located 100m further to the west (HER15155).

1.3.3 Saxon (c. 450–1066) and medieval (1066–1550)

Biddenham is mentioned in the Domesday Survey indicating it was in existence prior to the Norman Conquest. The DA is located on the western edge of the village (HER17017) and is c. 100m to the south-west of the 12th-to 16th-century church of St James (HER1021). Biddenham is recorded as having two mills at Domesday and it has been proposed that one of these was at Church End to the west of the DA (CPM 1991, 37).



A series of rectilinear earthworks (HER 1770) were once visible in the vicinity of the DA and on aerial photographs within the DA. These are thought to represent the ends of closes running west from Church End.

Medieval remains have also been identified during evaluation works in advance of the proposed extension of St James' churchyard. These comprised intercutting pits, ditches, a track-way, a pair of post-built fence lines and the possible remains of the former churchyard wall (Albion 2005).

The layout of the modern field boundaries on either side of the Great Ouse suggest that the road within Biddenham may have continued westwards and crossed at a ford. If this is the case, the DA lies within the possible continuation of the road and may contain remains associated with it.

1.3.4 Post-medieval (1550–1900)

Church Farm itself (HER1042) is recorded as an 18th-19th century limestone rubble farmhouse. Any alterations to this building may reveal remains associated with its construction.

1.4 Project Objectives

Although the footprint of the proposed footings and extensions were relatively small, they were clearly situated in an archaeologically sensitive area. The aim of the fieldwork was, therefore, to:

- Monitor/supervise all groundworks that had the potential to reveal archaeological remains.
- Investigate, characterise and record any archaeological deposits encountered within them.
- Prepare a report of the fieldwork findings for deposition in the Bedford HER and with OASIS.
- Deposit the project archive with The Higgins Museum, Bedford.



2 METHOD STATEMENTS

The methodological approach to the project is summarised below. A full methodology is provided in the Appendix 1 of the WSI (Albion 2010).

2.1 Methodological Standards

The project adhered throughout to the standards set out in the following documents:

•	Albion Archaeology	Procedures Manual: Volume 1 Fieldwork (2nd edn, 2001).
•	Bedford Borough Council	Preparing Archaeological Archives for Deposition in Registered Museums in Bedford (ver. 2.8, 2010)
•	EAA	Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England (2003)
•	Historic England (formerly English Heritage)	Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE) Project Managers' Guide (2015)
	0 /	Environmental Archaeology: A guide to the theory and practice of methods, from sampling and recovery to post-excavation, (2nd edn, 2011)
•	CIfA	Charter and by-law; Code of conduct (2014) Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief (2014)
		Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials (2014)

2.2 Observation, Investigation and Recording

Any groundworks that had the potential to expose archaeological remains, e.g. stripping of overburden and the excavation of foundations, were monitored by a professional archaeologist.

Monitoring was carried out on the pool area on 17th May 2011. Following the excavation of foundations for the pool-house, the AO agreed (by email dated 19/05/2011) that no further archaeological work was required in this area. The foundations of the kitchen extension were excavated down to undisturbed geological deposits under archaeological supervision on 30th October 2015.

2.3 Post-fieldwork Analysis

During and immediately after fieldwork all records were checked and cross-referenced to ensure that they were internally consistent.

Data gathered during the fieldwork was consolidated into an archive. This archive has been assessed and analysed to an appropriate level in the preparation of this report. This analysis work was carried out using Albion's networked Access-based database system and GIS.



2.4 Reporting

This report is intended to be sufficiently detailed to allow the results of all aspects of the fieldwork to be interpreted without recourse to the site archive. Where appropriate, it aims to place the results of the investigation in their local, regional and national context.

The archaeological remains uncovered at the site are not deemed to be sufficiently significant or extensive to require a higher level of analysis and reporting

2.5 Archiving

The archive of finds and records generated during the project will be kept secure at all stages of the operation. All records and materials produced will be archived to the standards outlined in Historic England's *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* and those set out by Bedford Borough Council.

Permission will be sought from the landowner for transfer of title of all finds to The Higgins Museum, Bedford on completion of post-excavation analysis and reporting. The project the archive will be deposited under accession number BEDFM 2010.30.

Details of the project and its findings will be submitted to the OASIS database in accordance with the guidelines issued by Historic England and the Archaeology Data Service (ref. albionar1-100396).



3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction

The location of the groundworks that were subject to archaeological observation, investigation and recording is shown on Figure 2. Selected photographs are presented in Figure 3.

Area 1 involved the topsoil strip of an area of c. 20.2m by 12.8m, followed by the excavation of the foundation trenches for a pool-house. The foundation trenches were located on the western side of stripped area and measured c. 15.9m by 4.9m.

Area 2 comprised the excavation within the footprint of the kitchen extension and covered an area of c. 9.2m by 4.1m.

Three undated ditches and a pit were located within the foundation trench for the kitchen extension (Area 2), whilst the foundations for the pool-house (Area 1) revealed that this part of the garden had been highly disturbed by modern levelling activity. Detailed descriptions of the deposits and features encountered are provided in Section 5.

3.2 Overburden and Geological Deposits

Topsoil (100) was removed from the area of the proposed pool-house to a depth of up to 0.2m, revealing underlying modern material (101) associated with landscaping of the area.

Observation of ground reduction within the interior of the proposed poolhouse identified substantial modern disturbance to a depth of 1.1–2.5m below ground level (BGL). Modern deposits consisted of a mix of redeposited natural gravels and topsoil containing brick, tile, concrete, tarmac, plastic and metal. It is likely these remains represent either the filling of a void and/or the disposal of construction waste during landscaping of the site.

Undisturbed geological deposits (102) were located at a depth of 1m BGL at the southern end of the footing, dropping to 2.5m BGL at the northern end. These deposits comprised a silty limestone regolith, likely to represent the eroded upper surface of the underlying limestone bedrock.

Within the footprint of the kitchen extension several layers of made-ground were identified beneath the garden topsoil (103) and subsoil (104). These included layers of redeposited gravel (105) and sand (106)/(107) beneath the concrete floor (109) and strip foundation (119) of the recently demolished conservatory. A spread of stone, mortar and concrete rubble (108), likely to be associated with an earlier phase of building/renovation work, was also present in the south-western part of the foundation.

Undisturbed geological deposits, consisting of mixed sands and gravels (110), were identified at a depth of c. 0.65m BGL within the footprint of the extension.



3.3 Archaeological Features

Three ditches were identified within the foundation trench of the kitchen extension: two within the western trench, [111] and [113]; and one within the eastern trench, [115]. A probable pit [117] was located at the south-eastern corner of the extension (Figure 2).

Ditches [111] and [113] were aligned approximately east-west, parallel to the extant building, less than 0.5m to the north. They had similar profiles and were 0.4–0.6m deep and 1.1–1.3m wide. The ditches were immediately adjacent to each other and slightly overlapped; the northernmost ditch [111] appeared to be the earlier and deeper of the two. The fills of both ditches were sterile and devoid of any datable remains.

Ditch [115] was likely to have been a continuation of either ditch [111] or [113]. It was located 8m to the east, and 0.65m to the south of the adjacent building. The ditch was c. 1.2m wide and 0.8m deep with a slightly steeper profile and flatter base that the other two ditches. Its sole fill (116) was most similar to that of the later of the two ditches and it is possible that ditch [113] was re-dug on the exact alignment of ditch [111] at this location, thereby removing all trace of the earlier ditch.

Pit [117] was less than 0.8m in diameter and 0.15m deep. It extended beyond the limits of excavation, and as such its full extent is not known. Its fill (118) was sterile and devoid of artefacts or other domestic refuse.

3.4 Interpretation and Conclusions

Monitoring of ground-works, in advance of construction of the pool-house, revealed modern disturbance likely to be associated with landscaping of the site. The depth of this disturbance is likely to have removed any archaeological deposits that might have once existed within the vicinity of the pool-house and proposed swimming pool and greenhouse.

The ditches and pit identified within the kitchen extension foundations were relatively well preserved; however, they were devoid of artefacts or ecofacts (bone, charcoal, charred plant remains, etc.). It is, therefore, unlikely that they were associated with a focus of domestic activity.

The close proximity of the ditches to the existing building indicates that they are unlikely to be contemporary. It is perhaps more probable that the ditches once defined the agricultural plot boundaries which later influenced the layout of the complex of buildings that make up Church Farm.

The function of the pit is uncertain, but its location and the similarity of its fill to those of the ditches may suggest contemporaneity. Its relatively large size and sterile fill may suggest that it was dug as a quarry pit.



3.5 Assessment of Significance

The results of the investigation indicate that, although areas of the garden of 63 Church End, Biddenham have been highly disturbed by modern levelling activity, traces of archaeological features do survive in close proximity to the extant building.

Whilst no dating evidence was recovered from the ditches and pit that were present within the extension foundation trench, they were well preserved below layers of modern made-ground. Due to their close proximity to the existing building, these features probably pre-date the current layout of the Church Farm complex, which is thought to date to the 18th–19th century (HER1042). However, the small size of the excavation area and the absence of any securely stratified dating material preclude any further analysis.

The project archive will be deposited with The Higgins Museum, Bedford (accession no. BEDFM 2010.30). This report will be uploaded onto the Archaeology Data Service's OASIS website (OASIS ID no. albionar1-100396).



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- Wymer, J.J., 1999 *The Lower Palaeolithic Occupation of Britain* (Salisbury, Wessex Archaeology and English Heritage)



5 CONTEXT DATA

Area: 1 Extent (ha): 0.023

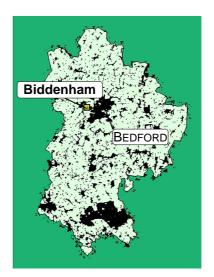
OS Co-ordinates: TL0130349872 Description: Area of the the pool and associated buildings (investigated in 2011).				
Context:	Type:	Description: Excava	ted: Find	s Present:
100	Topsoil	Loose dark brown grey sandy silt . 0.2m thick.	✓	
101	Make up layer	Firm mid grey brown sandy silt frequent small-medium CBM, frequent medium- large stones. >2.5m thick. Contained frequent fragments of plastic, tarmac and metal.	✓	₽
102	Natural	Hard mid grey yellow limestone	✓	
OS Co-		4 136149877 n of the the kitchen extension (Investigated in 2015).		
Context:	Type:	Description: Excava	ted: Finds	s Present:
103	Topsoil	Friable dark brown grey sandy silt moderate small stones. 0.2m thick.	✓	
104	Subsoil	Friable mid brown clay silt occasional small-medium CBM, occasional small stones. 0.15m thick.	V	
105	Make up layer	Firm light yellow brown sandy gravel frequent small stones. <0.4m thick	✓	
106	Make up layer	Firm mid red brown sandy gravel frequent flecks sand, moderate small stones. <0.2m thick.	V	
107	Make up layer	Compact mid brown grey sandy gravel frequent flecks sand, frequent small-medium stones. <0.34m thick.	✓	
108	Spread	Firm light grey sandy rubble moderate small-medium CBM, frequent small-medium concrete, frequent small-medium mortar, moderate small-medium stones. <0.13m thick.	V	
109	Foundation	Cemented mid grey concrete moderate small stones. Concrete raft for former conservatory, $0.12\mathrm{m}$ thick.	V	
110	Natural	Compact mid brown red sandy gravel occasional small-medium chalk. Some clay inclusions.	V	
111	Ditch	Linear E-W sides: U-shaped base: concave dimensions: max breadth 1.26m, max depth 0.6m, min length 0.7m	V	
112	Fill	Friable mid grey brown sandy silt moderate small-medium stones. $0.6 \mathrm{m}$ thick.	V	
113	Ditch	Linear E-W sides: U-shaped base: concave dimensions: max breadth 1.1m, max depth 0.43m, min length 0.7m	✓	

119	Foundation	Cemented mid grey white concrete moderate small stones. E-W orientated linear	✓	
118	Fill	Friable dark grey brown clay silt occasional small stones. $0.15 \mathrm{m}$ thick.	V	
117	Pit	Sub-oval sides: concave base: flat dimensions: min breadth 0.6m, max depth 0.15m, min length 0.8m. Probable pit - full extents beyond limits of excavation.	V	
116	Fill	Friable mid grey brown clay silt moderate small stones. 0.83m thick.	~	
115	Ditch	Linear E-W sides: U-shaped base: flat dimensions: max breadth 1.15m, min breadth 0.7m, max depth 0.83m	V	
114	Ditch	Friable mid grey brown clay sift moderate small chalk, moderate small-medium stones. 0.43m thick.	<u> </u>	

concrete foundation.0.35m wide by 0.4m deep. Vertically sided with a flat base.







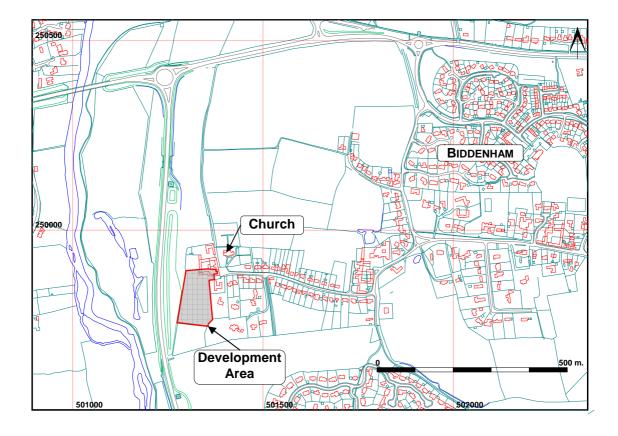
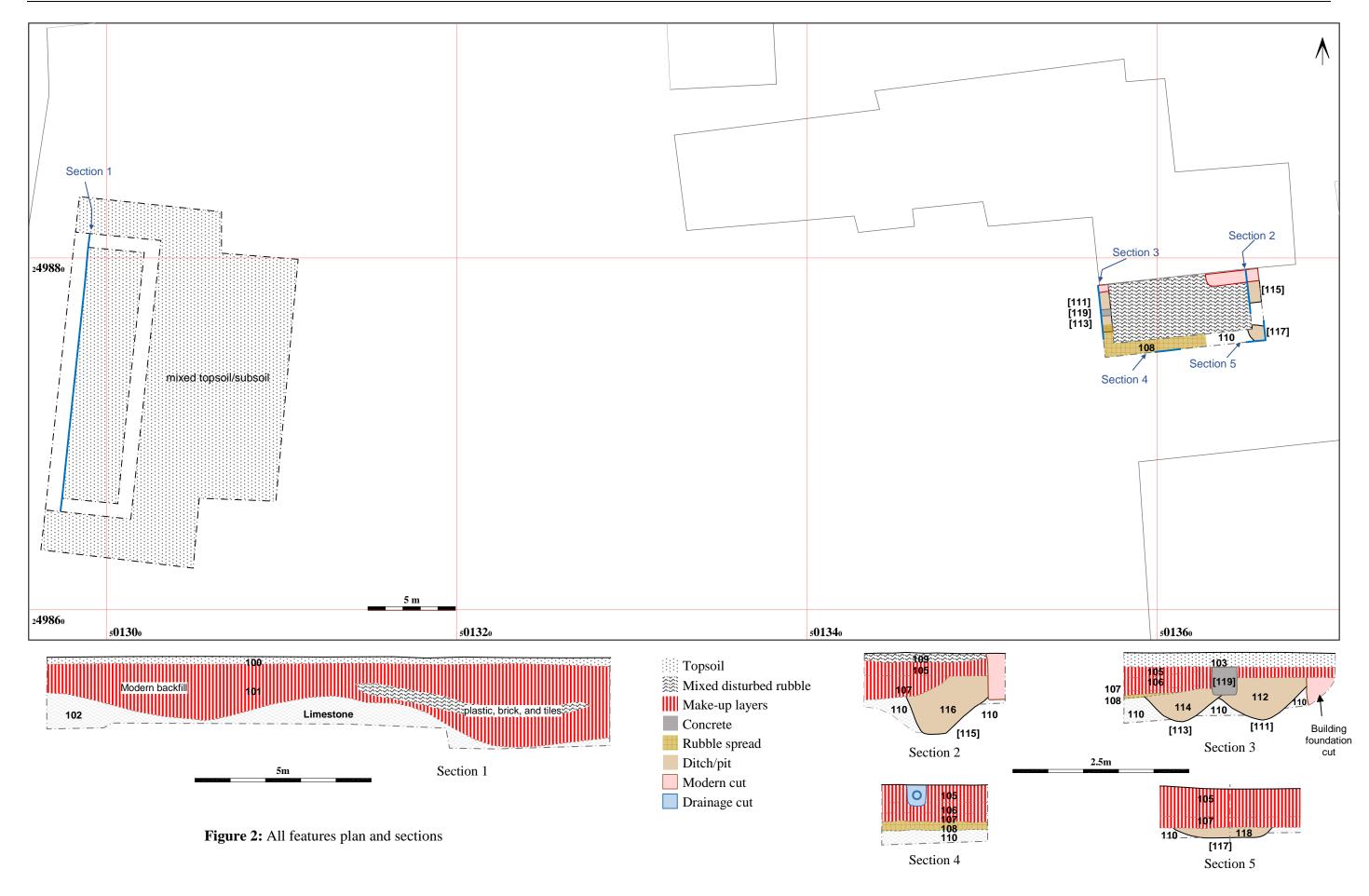


Figure 1: Site location plan

Base map reproduced from the Ordnance Survey Map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, by Albion Archaeology, Central Bedfordshire Council. OS Licence No. 100017358(LA). © Crown Copyright.







Albion archaeology



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